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ABSTRACT

This report examines the process used to evaluate five early childhood teacher education programs in Sweden, a process involving decentralized self-studies and site visits of approximately 5 hours in length conducted by an international expert. The report first provides background information on Helen L. Carlson, of the University of Minnesota, Duluth, who served as the external evaluator; and then explains the process of reviewing the self-study materials and the purpose and process of international review. The next section describes the site visits conducted at the early childhood teacher education programs at Malmo, Halmstead, Vaxjo, Karlstad, and Gothenburg during August 20-30, 1991. Contact was made with students, faculty, and administrators, though not all groups were available at every site. Next, the major tenets of the "Standards" and "Collegial" models of evaluation are explained. The next section reviews the Swedish self-studies from the perspective of the U.S. models, including comparisons of teacher education in the two countries. Next, examples are provided of the ways that the evaluation process itself effected change in the teacher education programs, and issues raised through the evaluation are highlighted. Two major questions concerning the meaning of teacher education becoming part of the university in Sweden and clarification of the purposes of evaluation in Sweden are raised, and recommendations for answering the questions conclude the report. (AC)

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Review of Sweden's National Evaluation Demonstration Project:

Early Childhood Teacher Education

by

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September 15, 1991

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BACKGROUND

Professional Background of Evaluator

Dr. Helen L. Carlson received her doctor of philosophy degree from the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, with emphases in early childhood education and social studies education. She has been an early childhood educator working with infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and their parents.

Currently she is a professor in early childhood studies and elementary education at the University of Minnesota, Duluth. In addition to her teaching and supervision duties, she has published over fifty articles and books and presented over seventy-five papers at national and international conferences. Finally, she has engaged in research and/or teaching exchange programs in England, Russia, and Sweden.

Process of Materials Review

Åsa Cornelius, secretary for the Early Childhood Teacher Education National Evaluation in Sweden, visited Dr. Carlson at the University of Minnesota, Duluth from June 10-June 13. She first described the evaluation model selected–an adaptation of the Netherlands model, a model which allows for decentralized self study and expert review.

Ms. Cornelius carefully reviewed the self study reports from the five campuses involved in the study–Gothenburg, Halmstad, Karlstad, Malmo, and Vaxjo--placing each program in historical and sociological context. The report of the expert board was also reviewed, with a special emphasis on its general recommendations.

Clarification of Purpose and Process of International Review

As a final part of Ms. Cornelius' visit to Minnesota, discussion of the purpose and process of the international review occurred. The review would be held at each of the five campuses and follow a similar outline. First, there would be a discussion of the effects of the evaluation, considering who and what had been affected by participation in this project. Second, there would be a presentation of evaluation models from the United States from the perspectives of both the "standards" and "collegial" frameworks. Finally, the evaluation project in Sweden would be discussed from both a standards and collegial viewpoint, raising comparison/contrast issues for consideration. (See Appendix I for copies of the overhead transparencies used during the presentation.)

Initially, it was thought that a discussion approach would be used exclusively. The purpose of the international review was to offer new perspectives for further discussion rather than rank each program or offer simplistic overall critique ratings. That idea was revised to include the short written report offered here.

SITE VISITATIONS--CONTENT AND PROCESS

Schedule of Visitations

Site visits of approximately five hours in length were held at the early childhood teacher education programs in Malmo, Halmstad, Vaxjo, Karlstad, and Gothenburg between August 20 and August 30, 1991. Contact was made with students, faculty, and administrators, although not all groups were available at every site. Group sizes ranged from four to twenty-five. In addition, there was informal discussion during lunch and/or dinner.

A debriefing session was held with representatives from the expert board on August 29, 1991, in Gothenburg. Discussion of the information shared in this report occurred.

Major Tenets of Alternative Evaluation Models from the United States

Program evaluators in the United States have split into various groups, each with their own set of principles, forming a continuum of models. On the one extreme, there are the scientists who seek to have objective data, to "measure" how goals have been fulfilled or how standards have been met. On the other extreme, there are collaborators and participant observer evaluators who seek to understand the complexities of interactions and study the effects of program components on the various people involved, the so-called stakeholders.

"The Standards" Model

The standards model specifies certain criteria which must be achieved before programs of teacher education can be accredited. By far the most important example of this is the NCATE (National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education) model which includes meeting the standards of state boards of education and professional organizations.

First, a brief history. NCATE was begun in 1952 as a way to assure that teachers were adequately prepared. The first revision came in 1956 when the National Commission on Education forced the state departments of education out of NCATE, advocating that it should be an organization of professionals (like professional organizations in medicine and law) rather than a governmental body.

The second major restructuring came in 1965 when the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education led a rebellion against the backwardness of the 1956 standards. It was the opinion of persons in this organization that the old standards failed to account for socio-economic and cultural changes in the larger society which had arisen from the civil rights movements. At this time new standards related to multicultural and special education arose.

By 1977, many professionals, singly and through various organizations, were advocating a radical redesign of the whole accrediting process. They stated that the standards were poorly written, lacked operational definitions, and varied in the level of expectations. A "tightening up" process occureed in 1982 revision. Separate programs could no longer be individually accredited; an entire unit now either passed or failed the NCATE process (Roames, 1989).

Then, in 1990, came the latest and most extensive revision. In the United States, there are grave concerns about the quality of the educational system in general and teacher education in particular. How to provide "consumer protection" was a pervasive force in creating the new standards. Standards now are found in five areas--knowledge bases for professional education, relationship to the world of practice, faculty, students, and resources. Hard, fast, quantifiable data has replaced the vague qualitative data of the past. Clear criteria are listed for adequate selection and admission procedures, for competent faculty, for financial support of the institution, for faculty involvement in the schools. In addition, teacher education programs must have a cohesive and common philosophy for all of teacher education (early childhood, elementary, secondary) which is reflected in individual course syllabi. The new standards have yearly reporting data forms, precondition reports, as well as five year review cycles with extensive self studies, and on-site visitations by expert and trained review teams. Upon completion of the review, the expert team submits its findings to the national NCATE board which then either supports or denies accreditation. (See Appendix II for a copy of the standards.)

The "Collegial" Model

In contrast to the "standards model" , a collegial model illustrates the other end of the continuum. Here the end result is not a pass/fail, accreditation or non-accreditation, but rather a deeper understanding of the process of teacher education and ways to change it.

A collegial model usually has three phases--the pre-evaluation phase, the evaluation itself, and the post-evaluation phase. In each of the phases, all of the stakeholders (those involved in the program) are part of the process (Patton, 1982, 1990).

The first phase requires that a program description be prepared which includes numbers and types of staff involved and some information about the organizational structure, size, history, extra organizational factors, organizational resources, and psychological climate. It is desireable that all program personnel are interviewed prior to the beginning of the evaluation in order to give recommendations about evaluation design. An evaluation model should be agreed to by all stake holders, from professionals at all levels to the recipients of service.

The second part of the collegial model, the evaluation study itself, involves identification of goals and objectives of the program, a review of the monitoring procedures which are either in place or need to be created, and a collection of data. The next step is the interpretation of the information collected. Finally recommendations are developed and reported.

The post evaluation, the third phase, uses the questions to determine the effects of the evaluation effort. What was affected, from the revision of goals and objectives to the modification of program components, and who was affected, from the administrators to the students are considered.

Review of Sweden's Self Studies from the Perspective of United States Models: Selected Examples

From a standards' perspective, there are several areas in which comparison and contrast are possible and where questions emerge for further consideration. One area is the knowledge base. In the United States, teacher candidates take general or liberal education separate from their methods and practica. Content specialists teach these courses to all students in various majors; thus, teacher candidates are part of the university system. In Sweden, teacher candidates take content subjects from teacher education faculty in a more integrated way. University students from other majors are not involved in the content courses from teacher education.

Faculty in early childhood teacher education in the United States generally have a doctoral research degree plus teaching experience with children. Some faculty in teacher education in Sweden have a research degree while others do not; some faculty have extensive experience with children, while others do not. This brings up some interesting tensions between the traditional teacher education ties to the field and university emphasis on research and publication.

Entry qualifications for students have increased in Sweden as has the number of applicants for available places. In the United States, students must meet multiple entrance criteria, including a high grade point average and passing a basic skills' test. Discussion about the types of entry qualifications for teachers in an equalitarian society like Sweden contrasts with the alternatives available in the competitive, individualistic structure of the United States.

Under the new standards, early childhood teacher educators in the United States must develop a comprehensive, coherent philosophical model which also is accepted by teacher educators in elementary and secondary education. Coupled with this are statements of exit criteria tied to the model. In Sweden, it seems that there is a more implicit, societally accepted philosophical framework; students, however, are asking for more explicit expectations. How to be explicit without being trivial is an important issue.

These are several of the issues raised from the "standards" perspective. All appear to be important considerations in early childhood teacher education.

To a great extent, a collegial model was used in the Early Childhood Teacher Education Evaluation Project in Sweden. From this collegial perspective, there are also several issues. It is important that all of the stakeholders are involved from the beginning of the evaluation process to its conclusion. In the on-site review process, several people indicated that wider and longer involvement of greater numbers of stakeholders in the design of the evaluation model, the collection of data, and the writing up of the interpretations and recommendations would be helpful. Change is more likely to be implemented if large numbers of stakeholders are involved in the entire process.

RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Effects of the Evaluation: Selected Examples

In some cases, change was underway when the evaluation began and the process served as an added catalyst. In other cases, the evaluation was a major force in change.

1. Course content has been added or the focus changed. For example, issues related to the care and education of very young children has been added. There has been an increase in use of research and current literature in the courses. This has been an expansion of international content within courses as well as new international study visit programs.

2. Course structure has also been changed. In some cases, course coordinators have been added to allow for continuity and focused direction. In other cases, content has been divided more clearly and precisely. Finally, numbers of faculty involvex in a single course have decreased.

3. Strategies to deal with long term change have been added. Working committees which include students have been added to engage in serious discussion about long range plans.

4. The relationship to the world of practice has been strengthened. For example, a "course" involving extensive inservice education and exchange of information has been added for cooperating teachers. Clarification of practicum assignments has taken place.

5. The administrative structure has been affected. For example, charts depicting the exact relationship of various levels of structure have been developed. Job descriptions have been written. Division of responsibilities and percentage of time working on various aspects of administration have been clarified.

Issues Raised through the Evaluation

Following are areas of concern:

1. How to develop a coherent overview of the teacher education program which is clearly communicated to students;

2. How to translate agreed upon ideology into actual changes in courses through a systematic change process;

3. How to include students in the available democratic processes through such efforts as leadership training and simulations;

4. How to facilitate student learning through varieties of "active learning" teaching-learning strategies and through guided self study;

5. How to agree upon and implement regular and systematic faculty evaluation and development;

6. How to make the evaluation process and results visible to the wider collegiate community and society at large;

7. How to encourage a common core or viewpoint among early childhood, compulsory school, and leisure center educators and teacher educators.

Major Questions Raised

Two major question areas emerge from this evaluation process. The first question area asks what it means for teacher education in Sweden to become part of the university--what is the relationship of disciplinary content and teacher education content? what is the relationship of field-based practice and on-campus university classes? what is relationship of research and teaching?

The second question asks for clarification about the purposes of evaluation in Sweden– who will receive the results of the evaluation and how will the results be used? will the results of a decentralized, collegial evaluation ultimately be used for allocation of resources? can a self-improvement qualitative evaluation really be separated from a quantitative report used to allocate resources?

Recommendations

To study these major questions as well as some of the more specific issues, a follow-up conference could be held. Workshops could be designed to both share the evaluation process and results and to deal with some of the issues raised--workshop to deal with systematic change process, workshop to to deal with leadership training for students, etc.

Within a decentralized context, an ongoing collaborative project among early childhood teacher educators in Sweden could be developed to effect long-term change within a supportive network. Systematic discussion and implementation of individaul and campus specific projects could connect with varieties of quantitative and qualitative research paradigms now being accepted in many academic fields. Credibility, consistency, and increased excellence in programs could result.

Connections with the European Community might also be very important in further evaluation studies. The increase of early childhood teacher preparation to at least three years would be consistent with directions in that community. Perhaps an evaluation report from a European Community perspective could be discussed with groups of Swedish early childhood teacher educators from various universities.

Personal Conclusion

At this time, I wish to thank the National Evaluation Board and the administrators, faculty, and students at Gothenburg, Halmstad, Karlstad, Malmo, and Vaxjo Universities for this openness and gracious hospitality. It has been a privilege to be part of the project.

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